

***SOUNDINGS IN THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE
IN BRITISH EVANGELICALISM IN THE FIRST
HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY***

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The subject of this study/1/ may require an apologia. What self-respecting *Dogmengeschichtliche* would waste time and effort, let alone a Tyndale Lecture, on so jejune a theme as this? Is it not self-evident that British evangelicalism in the twentieth century has produced no doctrine of Scripture that future histories of Christian doctrine will even mention? Indeed, has any theological work been done in this segment of modern Christianity of which the historical theologians of the following century will take more than the slightest note?

Whatever truth there may be in these rhetorical questions - and no doubt there is some - they reflect an approach to historical theology that historians, if not theologians, have been progressively abandoning. No longer is it defensible to ignore the doctrinal convictions of popular Christianity, no longer may the history of doctrine be written solely in terms of the official or semi-official formulations of churches or councils of churches and the *Opera Omnia* of eminent theologians. To bring the matter nearer home, what subject can be more worthy of scholarly study than the

1. This article is based on the Tyndale Historical Theology Lecture for 1978. The lecturer has subsequently benefited from the perceptive comments of several readers, including Douglas Johnson, Oliver Barclay, John Wenham, David Bebbington and especially Ian Rennie of Regent College, Vancouver. But for the interpretation here advanced the author alone must be held responsible, *salvo studio diligentiore*. These soundings are offered as a Forschungsbericht, and like all research remain at the mercy of further investigation.

fundamental belief of a substantial minority of British Christians, which will have had an unparalleled formative effect on the rest of their Christian beliefs? It may be small fry compared with *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and *Church Dogmatics*, but it may prove, to have been more widely influential than such sophisticated productions.

There is another, more domestic, reason to be advanced in justification of this subject. Evangelical Christians must become more self-conscious about the fact of doctrinal development as an *evangelical phenomenon*. In the long-running battle for the Bible, evangelical apologists have regularly argued that their doctrine of Scripture is nothing more and nothing less than the doctrine maintained by most of the church catholic until relatively recent times. The argument is basically sound, although its apologetic value has been grossly overrated. Evangelical Christendom's ability to believe about the Bible roughly what Christians believed about it in the seventeenth or seventh century, despite the massive revolution in biblical scholarship since those earlier eras, as much cries out for justification as it carries obvious apologetic weight. But in reality evangelical thinking about the Bible has not remained immune to change and (some would add) decay. Our contemporary beliefs would be set in a truer perspective if we were more self-aware and perhaps more self-critical about the direction of doctrinal development on this front.

This field of research is vast and largely uncharted. This survey can do little more than take selective soundings in the relevant literature. Periodical papers, in particular, have been barely touched upon, and attention centres mainly on Anglicans and Presbyterians rather than other varieties of churchmen, and on only restricted aspects of the doctrine of Scripture.

Moreover there looms the problem of definition. Who are the evangelicals? How broadly or narrowly should the boundaries be drawn? (It would certainly be untrue to evangelicalism to draw no boundaries!) It must suffice to alert the reader to the question, for it offers no scope for precise resolution. In general my concern will lie with that brand of Christianity known in more recent decades as conservative evangelicalism.

The challenge of 'higher criticism' loomed very large in the writings of the first years of the century. The titles alone are eloquent: *The Bible Under Trial* by James Orr, professor in the Free (later United Free) Church Colleg in Glasgow; *Lines of Defence of the Biblical Revelation*, by the professor of Arabic at Oxford, D. S. Margoliouth; *The Old Testament and the Present State of Criticism*, one of the 'Tracts-for New Times' put out by the Victoria Institute, this one written by the Institute's president, Henry Wace, Dean of Canterbury.

Not surprisingly the central arena was the Old Testament rather than the New. Another of Orr's works was entitled *The Problem of the Old Testament*; it is probably significant that he never wrote anything comparable on the New Testament. Sometimes, indeed, the point was made that the fortunes of New Testament criticism furnished hopeful grounds for a reversal of the assault on the reliability of the Old Testament. In 1902 Henry Wace expressed a guarded optimism of this outcome when crediting English scholars such as J. B. Lightfoot with rebutting the challenges of F. C. Baur and company; it is now 'generally acknowledged', he claimed, 'that in the New Testament we are face to face with contemporary testimony from the hands of Apostles or their companions'.^{2/} In a volume of essays called *Evangelicalism* by members of the (Anglican) Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen published in 1925, G. T. Manley pronounced the Tübingen school's attack on the authenticity of the Paulines a failure. William Ramsay and Adolf von Harnack had 'entirely re-established the authenticity and great historical value of Luke-Acts'. The net result of questioning had been to make the Gospels' picture of Christ more and more certainly true to historical fact.^{3/} Similarly confident sentiments about the 'complete vindication historically of the main features of the Gospel narrative' were voiced by T. C. Hammond in 1943.^{4/}

2. H. Wace, ed., *Criticism Criticised: Addresses on Old Testament Criticism* (London, 1902) 2-3.
3. J. Russell Howden, ed., *Evangelicalism* (London, 1925) 151.
4. *Reasoning Faith: An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (London, 1943) 228.

Whether or not such confidence was justified need not concern us now. For Dean Wace the recognition that critics like Baur had been refuted by other biblical critics enabled him to disprove any suggestion of hostility to criticism as such on his own part.^{5/} Such a position was regularly adopted by evangelical writers before the second World War. Not all were as explicit as James Orr: 'criticism . . . must be untrammelled . . . no one who studies the Old Testament in the light of modern knowledge can help being, to some extent, a "Higher Critic", nor is it desirable he should'.^{6/} Nevertheless the point was repeatedly made that the dominant 'higher criticism' was false not because it was criticism, higher or lower, but because of its naturalistic or rationalistic roots or because of its unscientific character. As Orr put it in one of the volumes of *The Fundamentals*, with reference to the critical work not of sceptical rationalists but of scholars who accepted in some sense the deity of Christ, it 'starts from the wrong basis, proceeds by arbitrary methods, and arrives at results which I think are demonstrably false'.^{7/} Another British contributor to *The Fundamentals*, W. H. Griffith Thomas, of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and Wycliffe College, Toronto, in a tract on *Old Testament Criticism and New Testament Christianity*, acknowledges that higher criticism is not only legitimate but necessary for all Christians, but enters a demurrer against its 'illegitimate, unscientific and unhistorical use'.^{8/}

Protestations of commitment to true criticism predictably varied in their generosity. One British contributor to *The Fundamentals* professed a damagingly qualified acceptance. In an essay entitled 'Christ and Criticism', Sir Robert Anderson, one of the ablest lay evangelical apologists of the period, first posed the issue as a conflict between true and false criticism, but then

5. *Criticism Criticised*, 5.
6. *The Problem of the Old Testament* (London, 1906) 18, 9.
7. *The Fundamentals*, vol. 9 (Chicago, n.d.) 34. Cf. G. T. Manley, 'It Is Written' (London, [1926]) 17-22.
8. Stirling, 1905, pp. 4-5. This tract was reprinted with some changes in vol. 8 of *The Fundamentals*.

proceeded to present the choice as one between Christ and criticism. Claiming to be no champion of a rigid, traditional 'orthodoxy', he advocated full and free criticism, but with one limitation - that the words of Christ shall be deemed a bar to criticism and controversy on very subject expressly dealt with in his teaching. For Anderson this foreclosed many of the most controverted subjects of Old Testament criticism.^{9/}

We shall return briefly to this question of the appeal to Christ the teacher. For the present it must be stressed that not only in the years of *The Fundamentals* but throughout the period evangelicals expounded their doctrines of Scripture not in a vacuum but under pressures create by currents of biblical criticism. In this major respect their expositions have a *Sitz im Leben* which marks them off from those of pre-critical Christendom, however close the similarity between the two. Modern evangelical accounts of the character of the Bible have invariably been essentially exercises in apologetic, which was only marginally true of patristic, medieval, Reformation and seventeenth-century statements.

This ongoing confrontation with mainstream biblical criticism was probably the chief factor promoting development of evangelical doctrine in this area. As critical trends changed, so too, if somewhat later, did the emphases and flavour of evangelical expositions. This assertion can be substantiated by noting the important role that ideas of progressive revelation played in many writers earlier in the century. In his book *The Future of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, Bernard Herklots, a vicar in the Lake District, wrote as follows: it is 'generally admitted that the law of evolution is active in all departments of the universe. The Evangelical Churchman has no quarrel with the law . . . In the realm of religious thought he observes the evolution of a progressive revelation. The frank acceptance of the operation of the law of evolution lessens the force of, even if it does not entirely, remove, all the most serious moral

9. *The Fundamentals*, vol. 2, 70, 79, 84.

difficulties of the Old Testament. He applies the law ungrudgingly to the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures.^{10/}

A similar cast of thought is plain in a volume called *The Old Faith and the New Theology: A Series of Sermons and Essays on some of the Truths held by Evangelical Christians, and the Difficulties of Accepting much of what is called 'New Theology'*. The contributors are all Congregationalists, spanning a rather broad evangelical spectrum. W. H. S. Aubrey, writing on 'The Development of Revelation', comes very close to asserting inerrancy, yet within the context of 'a gradual development of the Bible as the revealed Word of God'. 'Divine revelation is gradual and progressive, and has been evolved through the ages from the infancy of the human race . . . From first to last, progress and harmony are traceable. One dominant thought and one persistent plan pervade the whole, and the product of many minds reveals one spirit.' The harmonious unity of the whole biblical revelation is affirmed by Aubrey in a patently evolutionary or developmental framework; there is 'higher ethical teaching in the prophecies than in the earlier books . . . New Testament spiritual teaching transcends that of the Old Testament.'^{11/} The editor's contribution to this symposium speaks of 'the progress of religion for over 4000 years' in unguarded terms that place him on the evangelical left-wing.^{12/} A more central evangelical figure whose words evince a remarkable application of the schema of progressive development was E. A. Knox, father of Ronald and bishop of Manchester. His book *On What Authority? A Review of the Foundations of Christian Faith*, which is honourably cited by several other writers, argues that the Old Testament preserves not only rules of

10. London, 1913, p. 51. Ian Rennie suggests that Herklots was a forerunner of what within a decade or so would be known as liberal evangelicalism. He pleaded for toleration of divergent attitudes to critical questions which might split evangelicals.
11. C. H. Vine, ed., *The Old Faith and the New Theology* (London, 1907) 215, 207, 214, 216. The essayists' target was the notorious volume *The New Theology* (London, 1907), by R. J. Campbell, minister of the City Temple in London.
12. *Ibid.* 225-226.

morality but also quasi-historical traditions (on the origins of the world, the fall, the flood, the calling of the patriarchs etc.) which were intended only for temporary use in God's 'infant-school for mankind'.^{13/} As we shall see, Knox resolutely opposes any recourse to the example and teaching of Christ to justify the permanent divine authority of such elements in the Old Testament. Griffith Thomas holds that in the light of progressive revelation, 'perfect at each stage for that stage', Old Testament counsels and commands were to be accepted only if justified from a New Testament vantage point.^{14/}

It would be incorrect to imply that all evangelical expositors in the early decades of the century shared the boldness of these writers in spelling out the implications of progressively unfolding revelation; James Orr, for example, remained cautiously strict about the limits within which evolution must be confined.^{15/} But it remains true that a tendency to appeal to the notion of progressive revelation, particularly in order to vindicate the unity of the Bible and come to terms with awkward moral and religious phenomena, marked most evangelical discussion of the Bible. In this regard there may be a significant difference between Britain and the U.S.A. One reason why Britain did not experience a Fundamentalist controversy in the 1910's and 1920's akin to the bitter battle in America lay in the more widespread acceptance of biological evolution by thinking evangelicals before the beginning of the century. And whatever their professed attitude to philosophical evolutionism, many evangelicals displayed a cast of mind that reflected an evolutionary approach to historical development, including biblical history.^{16/}

13. London, 1922 p. 143.

14. *The Catholic Faith* (London, n.d.) 331.

15. G. Marsden, 'Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon', *Church History* 46 (1977) 215-232, at p. 219; J. K. Mozley, *Some Tendencies in British Theology from the Publication of Lux Mundi to the Present Day* (London, 1951) 126, 129f.

16. Conflicts and divisions broadly parallel to the American controversy did of course occur in Britain; cf. the splits in the C.M.S. and the S.C.M. leading respectively to the formation of B.C.M.S. and I.V.F. Cf. Marsden, *op.cit.* 221. British evangelical attitudes to evolution in the period under review merit further investigation in their own right.

In the deference they shewed to the concept of progressive revelation, British evangelical writers of the first decades of this century mirrored the phases of criticism with which they were grappling. The general point could be made equally well by highlighting the apologetic stance of many of these writings. By this is meant not simply their defence of more traditional views against critical challenges but their common conviction that the enemy was not merely unscientific criticism but varieties of Deism, rationalism and naturalism. As a consequence evangelical treatments of Scripture easily became preoccupied with evidences and proofs, often along rational lines, in support of biblical supernaturalism. These features were especially marked in the works of T. C. Hammond, whose cast of thought was much more attuned to controversy and apologia than to biblical theology.¹⁷ Writers like Griffith Thomas identified 'idealist' philosophy that allowed no place for supernatural divine intervention in the world as the fountain-head of naturalistic premisses which inevitably issued in naturalistic conclusions.¹⁸ So careful a writer as James Orr avers it to be beyond debate that 'it was in rationalistic workshops, mainly, that the critical theory was elaborated'. The dominant type of Pentateuchal criticism was 'rationalistic in its basis, and in every fibre of its construction'.¹⁹

This aspect of the literature will escape no one who dips into it, however cursorily. It is prominent in one of the most noteworthy books in the field, *Is Christ Infallible and the Bible True?*, by Hugh McIntosh, who was a pupil and admirer of William Robertson Smith and at the time of writing, 1901, a Presbyterian minister in London. The work extends to 680 pages of small print, and is probably the most thorough treatment of its subject produced in Britain this century. It is

17. It must be remembered that most evangelical Anglicans were militantly active against Anglo-Catholicism as well as liberalism, if not against Romanism with Hammond's vigour.
18. *Old Testament Criticism and New Testament Christianity*, 16.
19. *The Problem of the Old Testament*, 17.

McIntosh's steadfast conviction that scepticism and rationalism are responsible for most of the compromise theories that refuse to affirm 'the truthfulness, trustworthiness and divine authority' of the whole Bible. The appeal to the contradictions and inconsistencies of the biblical text was first made, he argues, by rationalists and infidels endeavouring to discredit Scripture *in toto*. There is 'no stable and rational resting-place between the supremacy of Christ in the Scriptures and the dismal abysses of agnosticism and unbelief'.^{20/}

McIntosh's approach is apologetic through and through, with interesting consequences. Although it is evident that he believes in biblical inerrancy, he refuses to affirm it because it is a more exposed position apologetically than the one he professes, which rests on the three-fold cord of truthfulness, trustworthiness and divine authority. He advances this standpoint as a *via media* between 'absolute inerrancy', for him a most objectionable and misleading phrase (the very word 'inerrancy' was the invention of the 'errorists'), and 'indefinite erroneousness'. But this middle way between 'traditionalism' and 'rationalism' has a decided inclination to the right. For McIntosh holds that the 'inerrantist's position' is 'practically irrefutable', and immeasurably stronger from the apologetic standpoint than any variety of 'indefinite erroneousness'. Nevertheless it is vulnerable to a single instance of proved error, and as such cannot be wisely espoused by an apologist.^{21/}

For all his refusal to confess inerrancy, McIntosh comes nearer to it than very many of the evangelical writers of the first three or four decades of this century. It can hardly be wholly accidental that H. Dermott McDonald, formerly of the London Bible College, in his useful survey *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1860-1960*, cites no evidence of evangelical scholars who affirmed inerrancy between Bishop J. C. Ryle who died in 1900 and the post-World War II era. He mentions preachers like J. Jowett, F. B. Meyer, J. Stuart Holden and G. Campbell Morgan who would not have allowed

20. Edinburgh, 1901, pp. 543, 597, 619.

21. Ibid. vii-viii, 542-545.

errors in the Bible, but his failure to document a widespread explicit confession of inerrancy broadly accords with the present writer's researches./22/

It is well known that James Denney of the Free Church College in Glasgow, perhaps the most gifted evangelical theologian in Britain at the turn of the century, felt unable to assent to any firm doctrine of biblical infallibility and inerrancy. 'The Word of God infallibly carries God's power to save men's souls. That is the only kind of infallibility I believe in. Authority is not authorship . . . For verbal inerrancy I care not one straw, for it would be worth nothing if it were there, and it is not . . . It is quite possible for me to profess my faith in the infallibility of Scripture . . . But literal accuracy and inerrancy are totally different things; and we do not believe in that at all.' /23/ It may be significant that these comments were all drawn from Denney's contributions to debates in ecclesiastical courts. He expressed himself somewhat more guardedly in his only considered discussion of the matter in his Chicago lectures of 1894 published as *Studies in Theology*. J. K. Mozley regrets that Denney did not devote more attention to the subject of Scripture. This may account for what seems a loose, almost amateurish interpretation of inspiration in these lectures./24/ In Denney's mind inspiration is almost equated with the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*, the power of Scripture to authenticate its message to our hearts as the very Word of God. Inspiration is 'really a doctrine of the word of God, or of the divine message to man; but it is too apt to be construed as if it were a doctrine of the text of Scripture', postulating certain qualities whether of Scripture as we have it or of an 'original autograph' of Scripture.

This capacity of Scripture by the Holy Spirit to impart what Denney calls, echoing the Westminster Confession,

22. London, 1963, p. 208.

23. J. R. Taylor, *God Loves Like That! The Theology of James Denney* (London, 1962) 140.

24. London, 1895, pp. 204f.; Mozley, *op. cit.* 130-136.

'a full persuasion' and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the revelation God made in (Christ)' he wishes to make quite independent of historical criticism. 'The gospels have every quality which they need, to put us in contact with the gospel . . . If they truly represent Christ to us, so that we gain the faith in Him that their authors had, is not that all we can desire? The evangelists may make mistakes in dates in the order of events, in reporting the occasion of a word of Jesus, possibly in the application of a parable We may differ - Christian men do differ - about numberless questions of this kind; but we ought to be able to say boldly that though all these be left out of view, nay, even though in any number of cases of this kind the gospels should be proved in error, the *gospel* is untouched.'^{25/}

The kind of position Denny expounds is sometimes referred to as 'believing criticism'. The literature identifies it as largely a Scottish phenomenon, but the label could well be stretched to embrace English writers like Westcott and perhaps more traditional evangelicals like Wace. Mozley summarizes the essentials of 'believing criticism' with reference to A. B. Davidson in these terms: "'The books of Scripture, as far as interpretation and general formal criticism are concerned, must be handled very much as other books." The books are the Word of God, and we bow under their meaning when that is ascertained. But the intellectual treatment "must be mainly the same as we give to other books".'^{26/} A very similar position advanced by Marcus Dods involves admitting the presence of trifling errors in Scripture while still talking confidently about its infallibility.^{27/}

It is not clear how many scholars should be classed as 'believing critics'. For Mozley the designation covered both George Adam Smith and William Robertson Smith, whereas Hugh McIntosh clinches his condemnation of the naturalism of George Adam with a citation from

25. *Op. cit.* 207ff

26. *Op. cit.* 105.

27. *The Bible Its Origin and Nature* (Edinburgh, 1905) 137, 151-154.

William Robertson.²⁸ McIntosh believes that his own views on the truth of Scripture and the infallibility of Christ were substantially those of Robertson Smith. He quotes the latter's refutation of the claim that Scripture 'contains God's Word', as though part of the Bible was the Word of God and another part the word of man. 'This is not the doctrine of our Churches, which hold that the substance of all Scripture is God's Word. What is not part of the record of God's Word is no part of Scripture.'²⁹ This appeal to the support of Robertson Smith is advanced, remarkably enough, in a volume which patently approves of inerrancy without wanting to argue for it.

But if few would want to include Adam Smith and Robertson Smith, whether or not they are fellow-representatives with Denney of 'believing criticism', as exemplars of a distinctively evangelical doctrine of Scripture, there can be no such hesitation over James Orr, who perhaps still merits classification as a 'believing critic'. Again we must take careful note of the way Orr expresses himself on the question of inerrancy in the details of the Bible. In his paper on 'Holy Scripture and Modern Negations' printed in vol. 9 of *The Fundamentals* he pleads for attention to be focussed not on such divisive issues as theories of inspiration and inerrancy but on the impression of the Book as a whole, as manifesting 'the power which you can only trace back, as it traces back itself, to God's Holy Spirit really in the men who wrote it'. In *The Problem of the Old Testament* he argues that one has got hold of the wrong end of the stick 'when the test of inspiration is sought primarily in minute inerrancy in external details, as those of geography, or chronology, or of physical science. Inspiration does not create the materials of its record: it works upon them.' What Orr means by this last assertion he illustrates by a comment from Matthew Henry on a genealogy in 1 Chronicles 7: the author merely copied what he found in his source. 'There was no necessity for the making up of the defects, no, nor for the rectifying of the mistakes of these genealogies by inspiration.' And Orr himself again: 'Inspiration, in sanctioning the incorporation of an old genealogy, or

28. *Op. cit.* 335f., n. 1.

29. *Ibid.* xii.

of an historic document in some respects defective, no more makes itself responsible for these defects than it does for the speeches of Job's friends . . . , or for the sentiments of man parts of the Book of Ecclesiastes, or for the imperfect translation of Old Testament passages in quotations from the Septuagint.'/30/

The presence in the scriptural record of features such as these leads Orr to dissent strongly from the view that 'inerrancy' is 'involved *in the very idea* of a book given by inspiration of God'. Such an a prioristic approach to the question is without biblical basis, either in the phenomena of the books themselves or in the understanding of inspiration thy support. Like Denney, Orr is fearful of the consequences of making the demonstration of inerrancy so crucial that without it 'the whole edifice of belief in revealed religion falls to the ground. This, on the face of it, is a most suicidal position for any defender of revelation to take up. It is certainly a much easier matter to prove the reality of a divine revelation in the history of Israel, or in Christ, than it is to prove the inerrant inspiration of every part of the record through which that revelation has come to us.' /31/

Yet if Orr is unhappy with affirmations of inerrancy, his last words on the subject are ones of 'substantial harmony' with its defenders. 'It remains the fact that the Bible, impartially interpreted and judged, is free from demonstrable error in its statements, and harmonious in its teachings, to a degree that of itself creates an irresistible impression of a supernatural factor in its origin . . . On this broad, general ground the advocates

30. *The Fundamentals*, vol. 9, 46f.; *The Problem of the Old Testament*, 49f., 486-487; cf. *Revelation and Inspiration* (London, 1910) 163, 179-181, 214. A similar concession is made in *The New Bible Handbook*, ed. G. T. Manley (London, 1947) 15-16; it would be 'rash to assert that the inspired writers who copied genealogies or scraps of learning from ancient records would necessarily be led to correct them in the manner dear to Western minds of the twentieth century'. Likewise Manley, '*It Is Written*', 125-126.
31. *Revelation and Inspiration*, 213, 198f.

of "inerrancy" may always feel that they have a strong position . . . They stand undeniably, in their main contention, in the line of apostolic belief, and of the general faith of the Church.' Mozley is accurate in claiming that Orr's 'tenacious conservatism' took him very close to biblical inerrancy./32/

No other writer merits the extended discussion given to Orr. But the position he expounded can be closely paralleled in other works of the period, which couple uncompromising assertions of the substantial accuracy of Scripture with failure or refusal to extend it to inerrancy. In the volume of essays by Anglican churchmen entitled *Evangelicalism* both G. T. Manley and T. C. Hammond assert that the general trustworthiness of the two Testaments cannot be pressed so as to prove verbal inerrancy in detail. 'It is a mere matter of fact', says Manley, that an indissoluble element of uncertainty and discrepancy persists, although Manley clears the Bible of scientific error./33/ Elsewhere Manley advanced a carefully differentiated position. On the one hand he evinces nervousness towards 'verbal inspiration' and 'inerrancy'. 'Our Lord certainly taught nothing contrary to them: but only on a forced interpretation of His words, or on an uncertain inference from them, could it be urged that He either held or taught a view so closely defined as these words might be held to imply . . . The thought of meticulous accuracy in matters of genealogy, numbers, or incidental occurrences is as foreign to His mode of teaching as would be a proposition of Euclid.' At the same time Manley argues uncompromisingly for the infallibility and inerrancy of Christ teaching about the full trustworthiness of the Scriptures./34/

T. C. Hammond is so far from handling the topic deductively as to take up the discussion on the basis

32. *Ibid.* 215-217; Mozley, *op.cit.* 127. Cf. Marsden, *op. cit.* 219.

33. *Op. cit.* 136-137.

34. '*It Is Written*', 128-129, 132-137. Christ's authority did not for Manley settle questions of authorship raised by references in his teaching; pp. 129-130.

that 'a standard (of freedom from error) at least equal to the standard of reputable human writings seems to be imperatively demanded'. He concludes that 'the message of God has been preserved in verbal form with substantial accuracy . . . The substance having been preserved intact, the minor discrepancies serve to excite our critical faculty . . . There may be an abiding intractability, corrected so as to reveal God, yet not wholly absent in the unessential but inevitable circumstances of revelation.'^{35/}

In his presidential address at a conference of the Bible League in 1902 Henry Wace spoke repeatedly of the 'substantial truth' of the Old Testament, the trustworthy narration 'in the main' of the story of divine revelation.^{36/} Bishop E. A. Knox argued in 1922 that the spiritual value of the Old Testament was independent of its historical truth and could be maintained even when a negative answer had to be returned to the question 'Is it really true?'^{37/} Griffith Thomas, who contributed to *The Fundamentals*, was close to Orr both in his inclination towards inerrancy and in refraining from explicitly espousing it. A rather stricter stance was assumed by one of the Congregationalist essayists in *The Old Faith and the New Theology*. 'If an apparent contradiction arises with the Divine Word that cannot lie or make a mistake', declared W. H. S. Aubrey, we must seek the fault in ourselves, for 'in the clear slight of advancing knowledge, and with deepened spiritual sympathies, the Revelation of God is always found to be consistent with itself and absolutely true.' However the editor of the symposium, C. H. Vine, clearly occupied much lower ground, recognizably similar to the 'believing criticism' of the Scots.^{38/}

It would be going beyond the evidence to speak of a consensus among British evangelical writers on the sensitive question of inerrancy. Although most of the authors under consideration acknowledge a very high degree of trustworthiness and accuracy in the biblical records, but one still falling short of inerrancy,

35. *Evangelicalism*, 179, 182-183, 185.

36. *Criticism Criticised*, 11, 12.

37. *On What Authority?*, 149-150; *cf.* p. 159.

38. *Op. cit.* 220, 227.

others such as David M. McIntyre, the principal of the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, and the Brethren leader W. E. Vine display no such reservations.^{39/} It is noteworthy, however, that in declining the confession of biblical inerrancy, many authors felt bound by the detailed problems of the biblical documents, as pinpointed in the conflicts with higher criticism, and were not disposed to assert inerrancy by deduction, as a necessary corollary of the divine inspiration of Scripture or the character of its divine author. In this regard the arguments deployed after the Second World War by writers like Dr. J. I. Packer appear to represent a development in twentieth-century evangelical thought - a shift backwards, to the views of nineteenth-century writers like Bannerman, Lee and Gaussen, or a shift westwards, to the constructions of American dogmatists like Charles Hodge and Warfield, that apparently failed to captivate mainstream evangelical theologians of the earlier part of the century in Britain.^{40/} When Packer states, for example, that 'to assert biblical inerrancy and infallibility is just to confess faith in (i) the divine origin of the Bible and (ii) the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God'^{41/} a marked difference is discernible from the reasoning of an earlier evangelical generation, which paid greater regard in the end of the day to the problematic details of Scripture. Among those here surveyed the one who comes nearest to Packer's

39. McIntyre, *The Divine Authority of the Scriptures of the Old Testament* (Stirling, [1902]); Vine, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (London, [1923]). Ian Rennie may well be correct in suggesting to the writer privately that an unqualified acceptance of inerrancy was the norm in the broad reaches of British evangelicalism represented by men like McIntyre and Vine. Here as elsewhere his comments have indicated further areas for investigation.
40. The reception and influence of Warfield's writings on Scripture in Britain, particularly England, remain to be examined. The first substantial British edition of Warfield was the collection *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1951), but the I.V.F. had earlier published as 'a preliminary step' a 31-page pamphlet *Revelation and Inspiration: An abridgement of Monographs* (London, 1941), a drastic summary by A. M. Stibbs of four essays from the collected volume *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York, 1927).
41. *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (London, 1958) 96.

position was probably Hugh McIntosh. Doctrinal questions were to be established from the explicit statements of Scripture, he argued, not from the phenomena. If the latter appear discrepant with the former, the former must decide the issue.^{42/} But let us remember that McIntosh so far respects the phenomena as to refuse to affirm inerrancy, and draws from the explicit biblical statements the confession only of the truthfulness, trustworthiness and divine authority of the Bible.

The distance between Packer's approach and that of a James Orr or a T. C. Hammond, in terms of recognition of insoluble discrepancies, may be very narrow, and it must not be allowed to obscure the fact that Orr and Hammond and many others such as Handley Moule of Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and Durham, espoused a deeply reverential regard for the entire reliability of Scripture as God's written word. Nevertheless a significant change may have taken place, with the result that the nature of Scripture is no longer established in dialogue with biblical criticism but determined deductively, a priori, dogmatically.

The restricted concentration of this study must not be taken to imply that our forefathers did not give extended attention to questions like the significance of inspiration and of the teaching authority of Christ with reference to the Old Testament. Each of these major planks of the evangelical doctrine of Scripture merits extended treatment in its own right, and no attempt can be made to develop them here. A few comments must suffice. The term 'inspiration' was interpreted in a surprisingly wise variety of ways in the first half of the century. The consensus that has more recently rallied around Warfield's exegesis of *theopneustos*, accepted by Berkouwer^{43/} among others, is not at all evident before the War. The subject of the authority of Christ as teacher owed its prominence partly to Charles Gore's notorious essay in *Lux Mundi* (1889), with its

42. *Op. cit.* 594

43. G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, 1975) 139ff.

application of *kenōsis* to the knowledge of Jesus. Most writers use the appeal to Christ's acceptance of the Old Testament Scriptures as from God as a clinching argument. Hugh McIntosh is again able to adduce a quotation from Robertson Smith: 'If I thought that anything in my views impugned the truth or authority of the teaching of our Lord, I should feel myself on dangerous and untenable ground.'⁴⁴ The only notable exception known to me is E. A. Knox. As we have seen, he restricts the authority of the Old Testament to what he calls its spiritual authority. He earnestly refuses to extend the imprimatur of Christ to settle issues of historical or literary criticism. 'To me the introduction of His Name is dragging the ark into battle . . . There is such a thing as illegitimate use of the authority of Christ.'⁴⁵ On one occasion Henry Wace based the substantial truth of the Old Testament on the testimony solely of the evangelists and apostles: 'I shrink, so long as it can be avoided, from bringing into this discussion the most sacred of all names.'⁴⁶ Finally James Orr spoke for others also when he declared: 'It may readily be admitted that when Jesus used popular language about "Moses" or "Isaiah", He did nothing more than designate certain books, and need not be understood as giving *ex cathedra* judgments on the intricate critical questions which the contents of these books raise . . . But Jesus unquestionably did believe in the Old Testament as the inspired record of God's revelation in the past, - did believe in the essential historicity of its contents, - did believe in Moses and his writings, - did believe in the law, - did believe that psalms and prophets pointed forward with unerring finger to Himself.'⁴⁷

In a recent article George Marsden of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, has argued forcefully for the essentially

44. *Op. cit.* xi.

45. *Op. cit.* 133, 141, 144; G. W. Bromiley, *Daniel Henry Charles Bartlett M.A., D.D. A Memoir* (Burnham-on-Sea, 1959) 42. Bartlett was one of the founders of the separate B.C.M.S. in 1922. Bromiley, pp. 40-49, outlines Bartlett's own position, which was similar to that of Manley and Hammond.

46. *Criticism Criticised*, 11.

47. *Revelation and Inspiration*, 153.

American nature of fundamentalism./48/ He compares it with 'its closest counterpart', British evangelicalism, and reaches conclusions that broadly accord with the present survey. Many evangelicals in Britain managed somewhat more comfortably than their transatlantic brethren to come to terms with both evolution and biblical criticism./49/ Marsden advances plausible reasons for the difference on the British side, including the stress on traditional piety without doctrinal controversy in Keswick circles, the tradition of conservative historical scholarship represented by Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort, and the fragmentary character of attempts to make a concerted evangelical impact on the churches and society. No less germane to the present study is the acknowledgement that between the Wars evangelical theology and scholarship rarely reached the level of distinction./50/ Perhaps some of the writers noted here were no more - and no less - than the brightest luminaries in a dark age of evangelical thought.

At the same time it is not sufficient for the historical theologian merely to regard what may be called the Packer doctrine of Scripture as marking evangelical theology's recovery of its faded glory. If there occurred in the later 1940's and 1950's a shift of emphasis of the kind suggested above,/51/ what brought it about? Was it the outcome of a latter-day injection of the Princeton theology of Warfield and others? It would not be unfair to characterize Warfield, the Hodges and W. H. Green as primarily dogmatists rather than biblical scholars, so that the question can be rephrased: did an approach to

48. *Op. cit.*, n. 15 above.

49. Cf. W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1954); R. A. Riesen, "'Higher Criticism" in the Free Church Fathers', *Scottish Church History Society Records* 20:2 (1979) 119-142.

50. L. E. Binns, *The Evangelical Movement in the English Church* (London, 1928) 83-84; H. D. McDonald, *op. cit.* 208.

51. John Wenham has made it known that he moved from a position of limited inerrancy to one of full inerrancy. The term 'infallibility' was rather, loosely defined in the I.V.F.'s explanatory booklet *Evangelical Belief* prior to its second edition in 1951.

the nature of the Bible marked chiefly by a preoccupation with its raw materials give way to one that operated predominantly with dogmatic constructions? /52/ Or should the sharpening of definition be attributed to the challenge of Barthianism/53/ and the biblical theology movement, which threatened to steal the evangelicals' clothes and blur evangelical identities? Or was it simply that evangelicals had found church history a salutary tutor and, learning the lessons of the 1920's, determined to forearm against a recurrence of the slide into liberal evangelicalism?/54/

Whatever interpretations and explanations are adopted, it is sure that historical precedent cannot dictate to the present. History can, however, deliver us from misleading images of the past, and thus contribute to the contemporary task of evangelical theology.

52. In 1905 Marcus Dods claimed (*op.cit.* 139) that inerrancy was accepted by no 'critic of repute' but only by some 'theologians of repute'. He had Warfield and Charles Hodge in mind.
53. Cf. G. W. Bromiley's cautious comments in the essay on 'The Authority of Scripture' in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Davidson (London, 1953) 21-22. Packer's essay on 'Revelation and Inspiration' was added in the second edition of 1954.
54. See the late Robin Nixon's apposite comments on the fate of the (Anglican) Evangelical Fellowship for Theological Literature in *Churchman* 92 (1978) 99-100.